

Britain: Tragic suicide highlights plight of young unemployed

Statement by Robert Skelton, SEP candidate for Manchester Central
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On March 31, Vicky Harrison, a young, bright, popular and talented 21-year-old took her life with a massive overdose of drugs.

Vicky's desperate act has left her family and friends devastated. Her death has also elicited empathy, sadness and anger amongst many more people, for the circumstances that led to this particular tragedy resonate with hundreds and thousands of young people. In a very real sense, Vicky's is the story of an entire generation.

Vicky, from Darwin, Lancashire, felt she had much to live for when she first left school. Full of ambition and drive, she had achieved three A levels in film and media studies and 10 GCSE's. She had set her sights in working in the film industry, in production, but after gaining a place at South Bank University in London was disappointed with the course and left after one year.

She wanted to teach, but instead spent months vainly searching for a job, any job.

Her father said, "She had decided university was not for her, but she never expected to struggle so much to find a job. The timing was unlucky because of the recession."

Vicky had applied for around 200 jobs, and spent much of her time approaching supermarkets and local businesses as well as looking in papers, job centres and the Internet to find work.

The day before she took her own life, Vicky had received yet another letter of rejection from a nursery school where she had applied for work as a teaching assistant. She was due to sign on, yet again, for her £51-a-week Job Seekers' Allowance the following day. But Vicky could no longer cope with the feeling of rejection and humiliation of joblessness.

In her suicide letters, left for her mother and father

and boyfriend, she said "I don't want to be me anymore."

Vicky is only one of a generation of young people who are being denied a decent job and, in her case, deprived even of hope for the future.

One million young people between the ages of 18-24 are now out of work. Vicky's death came the day after unemployment in the UK reached a 16-year high of 2.5 million. There was a staggering 75 percent increase in 18-24 year olds claiming JSA in June 2009.

For many young people who studied for degrees as a means to guarantee themselves a future and financial security, the situation is just as bad. Graduate unemployment soared 44 percent in a year and was the highest for a decade for those who graduated in the summer of 2008, according to the Higher Education Careers Unit survey. This statistic includes only the first three months of the initial impact of the financial meltdown that began in September 2008.

One in five unemployed between the ages of 18 and 24 has a degree. These unemployed youth and graduates will be joined by a further 300,000 graduates and 400,000 school leavers in July of this year, all desperately competing for an ever diminishing pool of jobs.

The number of applicants per graduate vacancy has increased by 18 percent, while 54 percent of graduates this year are not working in a field related to the degree they studied, taking whatever work they can get.

The situation confronting young people and workers will only get worse. None of the official parties contesting the general election are honest about the level of cuts in spending, jobs and wages that will be brought forward after May 6. All are committed to imposing austerity measures, estimated to include cuts of up to 20 percent in public spending, and tens of

thousands of job losses across the public sector.

For those like Vicky, there appears to be only great hardship ahead. None of the parties can speak to young people and animate them into political action; tens of thousands will not even bother voting, as the existing political set-up has nothing progressive and positive to offer.

This is because all the parties, big and small, defend the capitalist profit system—through which the parasitic elite grab the lion's share of society's wealth for themselves while trashing the living conditions of the vast majority of the population.

Only the Socialist Equality Party offers an alternative.

Workers and youth did not create this crisis. It was precipitated by the criminal speculative practices of the major banks and financial institutions. The SEP rejects all calls for "sacrifice" to fund the near £1 trillion bailout of the banks and to enable the rich to keep on getting richer, even as the world is plunged into recession.

There are millions of jobs that could be created and which are desperately needed in virtually every aspect of life. The infrastructure of Britain is near collapse—from the health and education system to roads and transport. We need more doctors, nurses, teachers, builders, architects, engineers, scientists, therapists and many other professions.

To achieve this means reorganising economic life on the basis of social need, not private profit. A workers' government would nationalise the banks and all major industries under democratic control and radically redistribute wealth from the super-rich to working people.

This is the only way out of the present impasse. To take up the fight for this perspective, a new socialist party is needed. I call on all young people to vote for me in Manchester Central, participate in our election intervention and to join the SEP and our student organisation, the International Students for Social Equality.



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